UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
LIMITED

E/ICEF/1996/P/L.24
6 November 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

FOR ACTION

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
First regular session 1996
22-26 January 1996
Item 6 of the provisional agenda*

COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY NOTE**

Jamaica

SUMMARY

The Executive Director presents the country programme strategy note for Jamaica for a programme of cooperation for the period 1997 to 2001.

In evaluating Jamaica's progress in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has pointed to several factors impeding the enjoyment of child rights, especially with respect to health, education, juvenile justice and general protection. Favourable national averages mask significant geographic and socio-economic disparities with respect to health, nutrition and education, i.e. with respect to their rights as children. Jamaica's stated national priority is the eradication of poverty. UNICEF will focus on those groups and geographic areas most affected by poverty and support processes that enable communities and families to solve their own problems. Advocacy and social mobilization will be used to further develop awareness of the needs and rights of Jamaican children, as well as the political and societal will to act on such knowledge. Capacity-building will be critical if the decentralization process is to be effective in poverty reduction. UNICEF support for improved service delivery is limited to selected low-income parishes and for children requiring special assistance, with an emphasis on sustainability. The empowerment of communities, parents and families, and children themselves is seen as an expected outcome of the programme rather than a strategy per se. The country programme will include four areas of intervention: social policy for women and children; basic education/early childhood education; children and youth at risk; and integrated area-based development.

* E/ICEF/1996/2.

** An addendum to the present report containing the final country programme recommendation will be submitted to the Executive Board for approval at its third regular session of 1996.

THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN

1. Jamaica has ratified both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Following the World Summit for Children, Jamaica prepared a National Plan of Action for Children which, at the national level, shows generally favourable indicators with respect to child survival and development. The mid-decade goals have been met with the exception of the Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative, and even there progress has been accelerating. The favourable national averages, however, mask significant geographic and socio-economic disparities in child health, nutrition and school performance. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its concluding observations on Jamaica's report, pointed out deficiencies with respect to the child's rights to health and education, juvenile justice and special protection.

2. Among the factors contributing to this situation are severe economic problems and a focus on economic adjustment. Social policies and related services, especially for poor families, children and women, have received relatively less attention. One third of Jamaica's population of 2.4 million are poor. Cutbacks in public expenditures in health and education and the removal of various subsidies have affected particularly the 40 per cent of households headed by women. The Government has vowed to improve this situation and has declared the eradication of poverty to be its first priority.

3. Although access to primary education is high, problems of school performance are persistent. The poorest children are those most affected: only 63 per cent of children from the poorest quintal are enrolled in schools. Many who are enrolled do not attend on a regular basis, withdrawing to do occasional labour. Parental support for their children's education, particularly for boys of poor families, is limited by immediate economic need and, in some cases, indifference. In 1990, one third of the children enrolled in primary schools could not master any tests at their grade level. Boys in particular are failing academically, not only in the primary but also in the secondary system.

4. Gaps in national legislation and the inadequate enforcement of existing laws do not afford adequate protection to children at risk from abuse, neglect and abandonment. In 1994, over 800 cases of sexual and physical abuse were reported - the highest yearly total ever. Since 1989, the number of street children has doubled to 2,500, a symptom of family structures being unable to cope with economic and other pressures. There has been an increasing use of violence by children - and on children - as a means of settling conflicts. Teenage pregnancies account for 24 per cent of all births in Jamaica. HIV/AIDS is emerging as another cause of morbidity and mortality in children, particularly but not exclusively in late adolescence; as of June 1995, 91 cases of AIDS have been reported among children under the age of 10 years.

5. Renewed Government commitment to improving the social situation has been accompanied by the recognition for local government reform, particularly the decentralized control of services. While the strategy is sound, it is not without problems. Local governments, particularly in the poorest areas where the greatest improvements are needed, are relatively inexperienced in project planning, management, implementation and monitoring.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PAST COOPERATION

6. As in many countries, Jamaica's experience with the Convention on the Rights of the Child has shown that ratification is only one step in the process of sustainable improvement of the situation of children. The body of national law is now under review, particularly with respect to the rights of protection. Ensuring that all children enjoy the rights of survival and development will require administrative reform and improved institutional capacity. These processes must be complemented by public education and mobilization to sustain civic demand for children's rights.

7. Jamaican girls tend to perform better and stay in school longer than boys, only to find their career options limited to low-paying jobs when they do leave the classroom. Studies have pointed to gender stereotyping in child-rearing practices, the school curriculum and appropriate role models as working to the disadvantage of both boy and girl children as they grow into adolescents and adults. The change of deeply-rooted, traditionally held beliefs is a long process requiring institutional modifications - as in the school curriculum - as well as attention to what happens at home.

8. In the first years of the decade, an urban basic services programme targeting specific deprived communities was successful in achieving higher immunization rates, lower levels of malnutrition, improved income earning abilities and organizational empowerment among specific communities. This model, combining expanded services with improved managerial capacity at the local level, can be replicated in the poorest parishes in the interior of the island. Administrative and financial decentralization to the parish level has made the improvement of local management imperative.

9. While a system for monitoring the health and educational status of children has been established, the information gathered has not been used systematically for influencing policy decisions. This deficiency must be addressed, again with new emphasis on local decision-making.

PROPOSED COUNTRY PROGRAMME STRATEGY

10. The Government of Jamaica has declared the eradication of poverty to be its highest priority. The agencies of the United Nations in Jamaica, as reflected in their work to date on the country strategy note, are committed to focusing future programmes on human resource development, the further development and implementation of equitable social policies, and improved services to selected, deprived and underserved geographical areas and low-income groups. UNICEF recognizes poverty as a basic cause of problems affecting children and will collaborate with the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with financial and technical support in favour of community action to eradicate poverty and in protecting children from the most pernicious effects of poverty.

11. The Government of Jamaica/UNICEF programme of cooperation will focus on (a) social policy, particularly as it relates to the rights of all children to survival, development and protection; (b) education and young child development; (c) the needs and rights of children who are in especially difficult

circumstances - frequently associated with poverty; and (d) improving the quality of life in designated low-income communities through the provision of basic services and community empowerment. The programme will seek to promote compliance with the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child through the implementation of selected and relevant goals of the National Plan of Action.

12. Because the needs of children in Jamaica far outweigh the capacity of UNICEF to respond directly, the programme strategy depends on mobilizing strategic partnerships. Advocacy and social mobilization are complementary strategies to further develop awareness of the needs and rights of Jamaican children and the political and societal will to act on such knowledge. Generating accurate and useful information on the situation of children, including local-level information with respect to the goals of the National Plan of Action, is an important element of this strategy. Communication is equally vital, and UNICEF will continue to work in alliance with the mass media, popular artists and leaders from the public and private sectors in public education and mobilization.

13. Institutional capacities to plan, carry out and monitor programmes in favour of children and women are not yet adequate in Jamaica, particularly at parish and local levels. As administrative decentralization proceeds, a new strategy will focus on local government and NGOs working together to solve community problems. The role of UNICEF will be to assist through training and technical support.

14. The strategy to improve services will be limited to selected parishes where the lack of services remains an important cause of poor child health and development, or where specific populations, e.g. out-of-school youth, require special attention. In both cases, improved institutional capacity of local government, non-governmental and community institutions will be the primary means for improving service delivery.

15. The empowerment of communities, parents and families, and children themselves is the expected outcome of the programme, as well as a strategy. At the community level, empowerment includes the ability of communities to better control resources through strengthened organizational, planning and operational capacity. For parents and families, empowerment includes a better knowledge of the rights and responsibilities of men and women alike, as well as better parenting skills. For children, it includes establishing a new tradition supportive of their rights and better education.

16. The country programme structure will have four components. The social policy for children and women will aim to develop further the legal and institutional framework to ensure the rights and well-being of children and women. The strategy includes advocacy and technical assistance for legislative reform and policy development, as well as social mobilization to generate sustained public support for the process. UNICEF also will provide technical support to improve planning, which will focus on the better use of information gained from monitoring the National Plan of Action for Children and the status of vulnerable groups.

17. The objective of the basic education/early childhood education programme is to improve the learning achievement of primary school-age children. National capacities will be strengthened for the planning, implementation and monitoring

of innovative techniques designed to improve the quality of basic education. Among the issues to be addressed are school community relations, promoting parents' interest in their children's school performance and increasing the knowledge and skills of parents and other caregivers in key aspects of children's mental, social and emotional development. Special focus will be placed on gender aspects of the socialization and developmental needs of young children.

18. The programme on children and youth at risk aims to improve the situation of children whose rights of protection are threatened. They include abused, neglected and institutionalized children, the disabled, teenage mothers, out-of-school youths, delinquents, street children and working children, and children exposed to HIV infection. Again, the strategy focuses on the community and the family, promoting better parenting and healthy lifestyles. UNICEF will provide technical and training support to increase the capabilities of formal and non-formal institutions to prevent, recognize and treat special problems of children and youth.

19. The objective of the integrated area-based development programme will be to improve the indicators for health, nutrition, education and water supply and sanitation in low-income communities in selected parishes. The strategy will focus on helping municipal governments and community organizations to work together on improving social services. This requires enhanced capacity for both types of organizations with respect to problem identification and analysis, project and financial planning, implementation and monitoring. UNICEF support for technical services and training in these subjects will help to sustain the improved services.

ESTIMATED PROGRAMME BUDGET

Estimated programme cooperation, 1997-2001 a/
(In thousands of United States dollars)

	General resources	Supplementary funds	Total
Social policy for children and women	510	1 250	1 760
Basic education and early childhood education	885	2 250	3 135
Children and youth at risk	1 090	2 750	3 840
Integrated area-based development	1 265	3 750	5 015
Total	3 750	10 000	13 750

a/ These are indicative figures only which are subject to change once aggregate financial data are finalized.